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ABSTRACT

This study explored how junior faculty perceive the academic tenure system impacting on their personal and professional lives and how they cope with the process. Using theoretical principles rooted in the tradition of phenomenology, the study conducted three in-depth phenomenological interviews with 18 assistant professors who explored, recreated, and reflected on episodes of their recent and distant pasts. The participants came from diverse disciplines within the university. This paper presents the narratives of four of these faculty members and an analysis. Findings indicated that females were more likely than males to mention the influence of parental expectations on their emerging career interests and appraisal of their potential; that many participants had a preoccupation with knowing where they stand in the tenure process and a craving for specific indices; that most departments are characterized by a culture of competition; and that, although males and females both struggle with the issue of social expectations, males appeared more likely to arrive at a decisive stand and point of resolution while females continually feel ambivalent. (Contains 48 references.) (JB)

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ON BECOMING TENURED:

ACQUIRING ACADEMIC TENURE AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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Paper presented at the Association for the
Study of Higher Education Conference

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Marriott City Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 29 - November 1, 1992. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

ON BECOMING TENURED:

ACQUIRING ACADEMIC TENURE AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

David A. Verrier

Much has been written in recent decades concerning the changing conditions of American higher education and ensuing threats to the "well-being" of the professoriate. Beyond the often recycled discussion of declining enrollments, retrenchment, and low salaries lies a deep-seated concern over what it takes to become and what it means to be a faculty member. Scholars variously describe a "crisis of purpose" and urgent need for a "more creative view of the work of the professoriate" (Boyer, 1990), a "restructuring of the academic career" (Finkelstein, 1986), and a "frustrated and dispirited professoriate" (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). Themes appear to converge, however, around the pressures and isolation facing academics early in their careers, the declining prospects of acquiring a tenure-track position and surviving the tenure review process, and the impact that the process can have upon academic work and personal lives. Regarding their academic work, for instance, a recent Carnegie Foundation National Survey of Faculty (Boyer, 1990), reveals that the pressure to publish as influenced by the tenure and promotion system in higher education has reached peak levels. While 21 percent of the faculty surveyed in 1969 strongly agreed that it is difficult to acquire tenure without publishing, by 1989 the number had more than doubled to 49 percent (p. 11).

The pressure and stress facing young faculty during the early phases of their academic socialization has attracted considerable scholarly attention (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Fahrer, 1978; Gmelch et al., 1986; Ragland-Sullivan & Barlow, 1981; Seldin, 1987; Sorcinelli & Gregory, 1987). Many faculty perceive

themselves to be caught in a labor market where they can be "churned and readily replaced" (Bowen & Schuster, 1986, p. 148). Securing a tenure-track position and enduring a probationary period of up to seven years becomes, for many, a consuming preoccupation. Whereas tenure seemed an almost routinely approved rite of passage during the growth years of higher education in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Lewis, 1980; Shulman, 1979; Bowen & Schuster, 1986), faculty who acquire tenure-track or tenure-eligible positions in today's academic climate must prepare for what may be an enduring "trial." And, of course, they must seriously consider the possibility that tenure may be denied. This fear only escalates the anxiety of what has already been described for some as a precarious, intimidating, and uncertain process.

The focus of my research was on the perceptions and experiences of 18 faculty at a major research university who are currently on the tenure-track or have been recently awarded or denied academic tenure across 13 academic departments. This primary research question was, "How do junior faculty perceive the academic tenuring system impacting upon their personal and professional lives and how do they make sense of, deal with, and derive meaning from the process?" It emerged out of my interest in how organizational socialization shapes the person, the way people deal with performance expectations, and the effects on the person of undergoing long-term evaluatory processes. Although tenure is but one of a larger array of institutional and disciplinary forces impacting the lives of junior faculty (Clark, 1988), the ritual of tenure review was viewed as a shared life experience from which to delve more deeply into the complexities of academic socialization. It was of interest to seek out and consider salient aspects of the female faculty experience, particularly in light of the disproportionately low percentage of full-time female faculty with tenure-track appoint-

ments and working at doctoral granting institutions (AAUP Annual Report, 1991) and their observed conspicuous second-class, marginal status (Finkelstein, 1984a; Clark & Corcoran, 1986). In this paper I will attempt to capture a sense of the perceptions and experiences of all 18 participants by focusing on the tales of four individuals who variously encountered and dealt with the tenuring system.

Conceptual Framework and Underlying Assumptions

The theoretical principles informing the design and conduct of this research are rooted within the tradition of phenomenology. This form of analysis does not limit itself to the investigation of "sense data" or realities that are objective in a materialistic sense, but, rather, has as its subject matter the familiar world of conscious experience (Schutz, 1962). The focus is on commonly encountered social situations, interactions, and institutions that we accept without question. It is presumed that we make sense by identifying and reflecting upon bounded episodes or "experiences" of our past. Ultimately, these discrete experiences "constitute" and thus have "meaning" for each of us in comprehending and making-sense of our present situation (Seidman at al., 1983).

In this study it is assumed that an attempt to understand the experiences of new faculty requires a consideration of their socialization within formal structures of schooling and the academic profession itself. Considering this, it is of interest to this study to focus on the norms, social roles, and structures within which faculty are socialized as graduate students (Baird, 1990; Bess, 1978; Katz & Hartnett, 1977). Graduate education is described by Bess (1978) as a time of "anticipatory socialization" to the faculty role, followed by a "resocialization" phase during the untenured years of the faculty career. Bess suggests that the "anticipatory socialization" process in undergraduate and

graduate schooling often results in "erroneous impressions" of the faculty role. Those who have specifically focused on the socialization of new faculty (Baldwin and Blackburn, 1981; Boice, 1991; Fahrer, 1978; Klapper, 1969; Mager & Myers, 1982; Rice, 1980; Reynolds, 1988; Sorcinelli, 1985, 1988; Whitt, 1991) reveal the effects of encountering disparate and oftentimes conflicting expectations as well as "surprise" (Louis, 1980) during early career socialization, including the forementioned stress, isolation, and balancing professional success with the demands of a personal and family life (Gregory and Sorcinelli, 1987).

The elusive notion of "culture" is a useful lens in this research since a cultural analysis moves research in the direction of "questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, raising issues of context and meaning, and bringing to surface underlying values" (Smircich, 1983, p. 355). Studies of faculty and academic culture suggest that the primary loci of belief, interests, ideology, and commitment lie primarily at the level of the academic department and one's discipline and/or scientific field. It is assumed that the shared understandings central to faculty are revealed in symbols, myths, sagas, rituals, rules, and standards of academic life.

The phenomenon of tenure review is viewed as a rite of passage shared by participants at this early career stage, serving as a common focus for a more in-depth exploration of their lives. It is assumed that the phenomenon of tenure review has the major properties of a status passage (Glaser & Strauss, 1971) including temporal, directional, and actor-specific dimensions. It is viewed as complex, variable, and incapable of being framed in a single way that corresponds to a universal form. Each person develops unique ways of making sense his/her situation based upon his/her beliefs, background, and prior experience.

The research focus of this study is framed solely from the vantage point of the junior faculty member. The interest is neither in examining differences in the way tenure proceedings are conducted across departments nor in how university guidelines and rules are interpreted and enforced. This selective focus on the perceptions and experiences of one set of actors in the process presumes the credibility and legitimacy of participants' perspectives on their own and does not lead to drawing claims beyond the scope of these perceptions.

Method and Data Sources

A fundamental characteristic of phenomenological research is the simultaneous occurrence of data collection and data analysis, viewed as mutually supportive, self-verifying and self-reflective processes. Over the course of three in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman et al, 1983), 18 assistant professors explored, recreated, and reflected upon episodes of their recent and distant pasts. The purpose of this interview methodology was not to "get answers to questions," "test hypotheses," or "evaluate" in the sense these terms and phrases are traditionally used. My interest was to identify a small cohort of junior faculty and to acquire an in-depth understanding of their lives. The methodology allowed me to gather narratives that have the potential to be meaningful, relevant, and have a sense of -- what Seidman and his colleagues (1983) term -- "connectiveness" for faculty who experience academic rites of passage in similar contexts.

"Criterion-based" sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) techniques were used to select participants, with the intent of identifying individuals with characteristics of interest to the study. Sampling was limited to a single research university, maximizing heterogeneity along the parameters of academic

discipline, gender, and stage of the tenure process. Being the primary source of professional affiliation, especially for faculty at research universities (Alpert, 1985; Lane, 1985; Light, 1974), participants were randomly selected from departments associated with varied academic disciplines. In examining variance across disciplines, it has been shown that significant differences exist in faculty role orientation, productivity, and accepted form of publication in tenure and promotion decisions (Fulton & Trow, 1974; Becher, 1987; Biglan, 1973a, 1973b; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1986; Roskens, 1983). From a theoretical vantage point, disciplines can be classified within groupings (Becher, 1987) -- pure sciences ("hard-pure"), humanities and pure social sciences ("soft-pure"), technologies ("hard-applied"), and applied social sciences ("soft-applied") -- that vary with respect to their epistemological features and their cultural characteristics. These disciplinary classifications informed the selection of academic departments for this study. Nine male and nine female faculty -- at a variety of points in the tenure process -- agreed to participate. The age of participants ranged from 32 to 48 years, with the females approximately five years older (mean of 40.7 compared to 35.4) than males on the average.

Differences among departments within a major university regarding tenure and promotion practices and publication productivity have been shown to be a reflection of the structure and culture of academic departments (Alpert, 1985; Burke, 1987; Gmelch et al., 1986; Lane, 1985; Light, 1974) as well as the size and demography of the social system itself (Knorr et al., 1979; McCain et al., 1983). To the degree that procedures, practices, and criteria applied in tenure review vary across departments, it can be theorized that the junior faculty experience of the process and the meaning they make of it vary as well.

Following transcription of the 54 interviews, disciplined categorical readings and notating of transcripts were conducted to develop a comprehensive coding scheme of over 100 codes clustered within eight categories reflecting the theoretical interests of the study. Utilizing computer software, text domains and notations were converted into a sorting program to allow for isolation of related text for analysis.

Four Participants

This study does not purport to describe the lives and experiences of all junior faculty at major research universities. Nor does it put forth claims about the intra-workings of academic departments, processes and procedures of the academic tenuring system, or describe the academic reward system. Insights into academic culture and life in academic departments are revealed through the perceptions of participants via individual narratives. As a means of preserving some sense of the context and integrity of each individual's narrative, I highlight in this paper the perceptions and experiences of four of the eighteen participants who have variously encountered socialization and adjustments during early stages of their academic career. I have selected one participant in each of the four disciplinary classifications and two from either gender to preserve a sense of the delimitations and theoretical interests of the study. Brief biographies of the four participants, under pseudonymous names, follow:

Mary

Mary is a 35 year-old assistant professor in her 4th year at the current institution in a humanities department. Although she describes neither parent as "an academic," all three siblings attended college. Mary worked as a journalist and in the hotel business prior to pursuing masters and Ph.D. work.

Upon completing her doctorate, she accepted her current position over an offer from a small liberal arts college. Mary is single without children.

Bob

Bob is a 35 year-old assistant professor in his 4th year in a department that can be classified as a technology. Growing up in the midwest, he was raised in -- what he describes as -- an "essentially blue-collar family." He spent six years on the east coast working for two private sector firms prior to pursuing doctoral studies. He chose to seek an academic position despite offers and opportunities to return to the private sector. Bob is married with two children.

Karen

Karen is a 41 year-old assistant professor in her 3rd year holding a split-appointment between an applied social science department and a non-academic unit. She grew up on a midwestern farm with parents she describes as "fairly unsophisticated." Her twin sister and she trailed in the wake of a favored older brother. She attended Catholic primary schools and was often separated from her sister. "Swimming against the current," she worked her way through college and, with the support of female mentors, pursued graduate studies. Following the PhD, she intentionally selected an academic position where she would be expected to be a scholar. Karen lives with her partner without children.

Paul

Paul is a 34 year-old assistant professor in his 2nd year at the current institution with a split-appointment between a research center and a "pure science" department. He grew up in a small town in the midwest, one of three siblings, with both parents having graduated from college. Growing up his "focus was sports" though his interest in science began in high school. Encouraged to pursue higher education, he pursued graduate studies immediately

following his undergraduate degree and went "straight for the Ph.D." He completed post-doctoral work at a private west coast university for two years prior to accepting his current position. Paul's wife is employed in a related academic field. They have two children.

Prior Experiences

Participants were posed with questions asking them to "tell the story of their lives" up to the time they accepted and joined the faculty at the current institution. Many were strongly influenced by their family life and values, role modelling, and relationships with their parents. Despite the force of parental expectations, a number of participants -- primarily males -- experienced an early recognition of their intrinsic power to direct their own life and destiny. Paul, for instance, felt a fair amount of pressure within his circle of college peers to go to medical school, yet knew inside that it was not the right career:

> It wasn't a big deal, because I never really wanted to go (to medical school). It wasn't something that I felt like I had to do. People everywhere, "Well, why don't you? You'll make lots of money." Well, it's not what I want to do. And people didn't understand that, but I didn't feel pressured in the sense that it made me anxious. Definitely people would say things, but I never took it as causing me to really weigh any decision, because I wasn't going to do it. (Paul)

For the majority of females in the sample, however, parental influence was not as easily challenged. Expectations of authority figures, including parents, were often noted as influencing their appraisal of their potential, their self-concept, and self-expectations. One female described this phenomenon as being "socialized to be powerless." Growing up on a farm in the midwest with a twin sister, older brother, and parents she describes as "fairly unsophisticated," Karen reveals a childhood and adolescence marred by constant comparison, differential treatment, and trailing in the wake of a favored older brother:

> My brother was 9 months old when my mother found out she was pregnant. And she cried -- she says -- for one whole day when she found out she was pregnant, and then she cried another whole day when she found out that she was having twins. So we always felt like we were a major inconvenience. That was very clear. It didn't even take a lot of guesswork. (Karen)

The short and long term impact of constant comparison and ongoing neglect on the twins is readily identifiable in Karen's words and emotions during my initial interview with her. She continues,

> I have felt a lot of pressure to [achieve] -- yes, because my brother was considered ... "the star" and we (her twin sister and her) were "the dumbbells." So I've always been swimming against that current. That's always been there. And in some ways, my life has kind of been a reaction formation to my brother. He studied Spanish, so I studied French, and he was sent to Catholic schools, we went to public school. He had college paid for.... The message to us was if we wanted to go to college we were on our own, and we put ourselves through college.... So I guess in the face of all that energy against us achieving, yeah, we did exert a lot of energy to achieve because it was a constant struggle. (Karen)

This "constant struggle" continues, in her mind, up to the present and echoes in recollections of her parents' reactions to her pursuing and achieving the doctoral degree:

> And even going for my Ph.D., my parents were just so discouraging -- they were just dead-set against it. They felt that I had this teaching job and I could stay there -- why rock the boat and do something different, even though my brother had been through the Ph.D. thing.... I remember my brother and I were (once) on the academic job market at the same time. This was pre-Ph.D. for me, and he was probably a Ph.D. candidate at the time. And I got a call from this Catholic college in [a northeast town] offering me a job, and I told my parents ... and my father said, "Oh, too bad it wasn't your brother." I mean, that's how persistent that competition has been.... Now, my parents' resistance to me studying did not prevent them from coming down to [her doctoral institution] and just taking all kinds of congratulations upon themselves because I had graduated. So they enjoyed showing up at occasions like that to collect all the praise, when they're really very much in opposition to it, very unsupportive all along the way. (Karen)

For Karen, "swimming against that current" of lifelong sex-role stereotyping, imposed judgments, comparison, and differential treatment by her parents has had

enduring effects, perhaps depicted most succinctly in her use of the adjectives "enraging" and "suffocating."

For the women I interviewed, a sense of personal empowerment was often spurred on by an influence outside of the immediate family. Mary recollects two male professors, one during undergraduate and the other during graduate studies, who strongly influenced her decision to further her education and to consider career decisions she might have not have otherwise. She recalls the undergraduate professor:

> The thing that really triggered me to realizing that I really could go back to school was a phone call out of the blue from a history professor of mine from my undergraduate college offering me an assistantship to come back and get my masters in history. That wasn't what I wanted to do but I thought if somebody in history would offer me an assistantship than somebody in [her current field] must be able to help somewhere. So that's when I started sending out applications.... I was so nervous about being there and the first paper I wrote, I worked on it very hard and (a graduate school) professor called me into his office and he said that he had just read my paper and he wanted to talk to me. His words to me were "How serious are you about getting a masters degree?" I thought he was going to tell me that he thought I should give it up and be a housewife or be a dental hygienist or something but don't go this route. I said that I'm very serious about it and immediately I could feel that I was quivering inside and ready to fall through the floor. He said "Good because I think you're the kind of student that we want here." That was such a relief to get positive feedback from him and I really felt like I was going somewhere then. (Mary)

And as a graduate student, Mary recalls the "good fortune" in finding someone she respected to be her advisor, "who sort of nurtured me from the very beginning ... who helped me learn the ropes." In the midst of ongoing self-questioning and periods of low self-confidence, she took constructive feedback from her male advisor to begin to stop "relying so much on everybody else and start thinking for myself."

In Karen's case, one of a number of influential female mentors she mentioned intervened at a critical point during her undergraduate studies:

> I was just exhausted. I was working a lot, my grades were slipping so I didn't feel good about what I was doing, and then, in the middle of all this, I was assigned an [undergraduate] advisor who actually wanted to see me and talk to me -- it was a woman. It was the first faculty member I really had any contact with outside of class. And we were sitting there, and I remember her saying, "What are your plans about graduate school?" I mean, and here I thought ... "I must really be fucking retarded that I can't be doing any of this work and (yet) getting good grades." And I thought, "Graduate school? I feel like I'm flunking out of college." And she said, "Well, you have to go to graduate school. You're capable of graduate work." [DV: What did she see in you?] I have no idea. It was like she could see inside my brain or something. And the only thing I can attribute it to is that there was something about the way I was in her class that made her think that (Karen was capable of graduate work), and to me it wasn't me in her class. It was her class in me. She was just so dynamic. I don't think I could even recall any of my other teachers from my first two years of school, but she was a giant. She was just such a powerful woman. She knew her stuff, she was compassionate, sensitive. Everybody else had seemed very gruff and busy, and this woman was kind and understanding, in addition to being brilliant. Everybody else was brilliant, but they didn't give a shit about me. (Karen)

This faculty member had a pivotal impact on how Karen viewed her self, her capabilities, and her future. Karen was one of a number of females in the study who spoke of female mentors as inspirational and supportive, as individuals who would go out of their way to promote a protege's success.

Sometimes these female faculty with female mentors -- like Mary and Karen -- found themselves foreseeing what it would be like to be in the position of a female mentor. Mary recalls an experience during her graduate studies:

> I remember in my masters program I was downstairs in this little coffee room that they had in the [her graduate department] building working and drinking something and one of female professors came down and sat with me and she was practically in tears and she said "Let me just tell you what is ahead of you as female professor at an institution. There aren't enough women in this profession that they have to have a certain number of women on committees so you get put on every committee. So if you think you're going to be able to do your work, you're wrong because you're going to committee meetings all the time." And she just went on and on and on about all the pressure that was put on women in this profession. And that really scared me. I didn't want to be the token woman on every committee and not be able to get my own work done. That was not what I was in it for. That made me a little bit nervous. (Mary)

Prior experiences with structures of family and schooling thus had a notable influence on the expectations, attitudes, and emerging priorities of these faculty. Across participants, the influence of being socialized within a profession that values certain activities over others was vividly apparent. As an example, consider Mary's recollections:

> I think I got into this field initially because I wanted to teach and write a couple of articles on the side.... When I was a doctoral candidate I realized what people had kept telling me -- that it was the research that counted. We were even told as graduate students teaching classes that to work on those papers for your classes and put the teaching second even third because those papers would be the papers that would be formed into articles, that would be published, that would get you the position ... that would get you tenure -- and so all the emphasis was put on that and very little was put on teaching. (Mary)

As is the case with the ascendant position of scholarly research in the academic reward system, the low priority status of teaching has been inbred and instilled in many of the faculty with whom I spoke and is part of their socialization into the profession.

Perceptions of "Life on the Tenure Track"

Participants' tales of life in their academic departments during the second interview centered primarily around perceptions of interpersonal relationships among faculty colleagues. It became apparent that much of their day-to-day business is influenced by interactions with colleagues as well as perceived status and prestige distinctions in the department. Of these distinctions, academic rank was but one of a variety of lenses participants used to distinguish themselves from their colleagues. Beyond such commonly used labels as junior/senior and tenured/non-tenured, participants referred to such distinctions as "the young turks" versus "the old warriors," "the teachers" versus "the researchers," and "the professionals" versus "the scholars" among others. Such

an array of distinctions within a work unit leads to the perception that certain groups and/or individuals have differential statuses, access to resources, opportunities, and subsequent advantages in comparison to others.

As revealed in the tales of female faculty, differentiations among faculty extend to the areas of gender, race, and sexual orientation. Issues related gender and lifestyle are at the forefront of Karen's female colleagues' minds as they strategize how to best have Karen's candidacy brought before the department's promotion and tenure committee. These indices become chips in a bargaining process:

> Then there's the whole layer of my lifestyle, and what, if anything, that's going to mean. The research director ... said that there was some concern by the women faculty -- unnamed who these were, but I can guess who they were -- about the composition of the [P&T] committee, because one of the guys is very "traditional" is the word she used. And so they've been worried.... And she said, "But we decided that this guy's a very political animal and he does stuff for you because you'll do stuff for him, and there are several of us he owes because we did stuff for him, and since he's very political he would understand the notion of "cashing in their markers." So they said, "We figure we'll 'cash in some of our markers' on this one." And I wasn't sure if they were meaning me or if they were talking about the black woman who's coming up for tenure now, or both of us -- me because I'm a lesbian, and her because she's black. So I do worry about that. (Karen)

Karen's comments portray the degree to which lifestyle issues can be perceived as infusing the politics of promotion and tenure.

Most participants revealed an identification with other junior faculty in the midst of the tenure process. This appeared to be related to the composition and/or placement of peers in the tenure process or the basic demographics of the department. For Bob, the boundaries of his "cohort group" fluctuate depending upon the vantage point he assumes. He responds to my question regarding who he considers to be in his cohort:

> Basically assistant professors I would consider a cohort group, but I'm not counting all assistant professors. I'm counting a sub-set

> of those -- that is, those who were hired either after me or within about a year before me. So we're the ones that are basically in competition, you might say -- if you want to look at it that way -- for tenure at this point. We're all the ones most concerned about this problem. We're the ones that are either going up next year, or the year after that. I suppose I could even throw into that group the ones going up this year ... (Bob)

For Bob, those he includes in the "cohort group" are viewed "in competition" for tenure. As he examines the combination of assistant professors "going up" for final tenure review, the demographics of the department have him on edge:

> ... next year there will be a pretty good number go up. The year after, there will be a pretty good number. Whether I go next year or the year after doesn't matter. There will be a fair number in each case ... We have quite a large number of assistant professors who are right on the threshold of that decision process, so as another person (in his department) ... describes it, all hell's going to break loose around here pretty soon. Because, if things go according to form, there are going to be a lot of people not tenured, or somebody's going to have to come to grips with the reality of this thing and say we can't just unload all these people after this period of time ... it just doesn't make sense. So something's going to happen. (Bob)

Bob's tale of strained dynamics of competition among tenure-track colleagues resurfaces at a point later in the conversation:

> The person who mentioned this concept (that "all hell's going to break loose around here pretty soon") to me, I think, was sort of subtly suggesting that I may want to defer going up so that I don't go up early ... because I conceivably could damage somebody else's -- not his, somebody else's -- chances. I don't think that's the case. I mean, jokingly, one other person who will go up next year -- and therefore would go up with me if I go early -- this other person jokingly said, "I don't want you going up next year." Why not? "I don't want your file going up at the same time as mine. I don't want them put next to each other." But I think he was making a joke -- at least I hope he was, anyway. (Bob)

He appears to not want to believe that the latter colleague was serious in his perhaps not-so-subtle suggestion that Bob defer "going up" for his final sixth year review. These dynamics have some influence upon how he anticipates his own chances for successfully acquiring tenure.

Many, including Mary, Bob, and Karen, are so preoccupied with the composition of their cohort and the timing of their reviews that it influences the way they think about their own chances of acquiring tenure. For Mary, comparing herself to her peers is apparently unavoidable:

> I think we all sort of feel bound in some way, because we're in the same precarious situation. But I think we also feel competitive to a certain extent. There is the question whether there will be room for four people, or whether people will, maybe not consciously but unconsciously, make comparisons between us and say, "Well, I like her but I don't like him." Whereas if we had come up singly, we would have been judged on our own merits. So there is that question. I'm not really that close to any of the other people (coming up for tenure), but I'm coming up for tenure, so I can't really say.... One of the guys is in [a sub-field], so I don't see a whole lot of him although we did our Ph.D. at the same school. So he's probably the one I'm closest to. But I'm not social with him, so I can't say that it affects me at all, except for this question about whether we'll be judged for ourselves or as a group. [DV: Do you think you'll be judged on your own merit or compared as a group?] I don't know. I have no sense at all about that. I've asked a couple of people at parties and things, and some of them will say, "Yes, that's a possibility that you will be compared." And others say, "No, people won't do that." (Mary)

As the topic of conversation in social situations extends to whether individuals will be judged on their own merits, Mary is left perplexed and concerned.

A preoccupation with the tenure experiences of colleagues not only focuses on members of the perceived "cohort group," but also on forerunners who have recently been through stages of the tenure process. Anticipating her fourth year review, Mary's recalls her feelings of trailing in the wake of an identifiable group of colleagues:

> So there will be four of us coming up in the spring for fourth-year review. The scary thing was, the first year we were here, three people were let go at the fourth-year review. And I think the department was so worried that we would get the wrong message because they had a number of people come around to us and say "Look, these were the circumstances why these people didn't get tenure, and we don't hire anybody that we don't think has a chance of getting tenure." So they tried to reassure us along those lines. But that was really scary. Three people came up for fourth-year review, and none of them got it. And so you started worrying about whether what they were telling you was really true. (Mary)

The experiences of forerunners has a long-term influence on Mary as she tries to gauge her own prospects for success. The aftermath of colleagues being "let go" at the fourth-year review are feelings in Mary of fear and suspicion. Not knowing how to interpret the gestures of senior faculty, she questions their justifications and the veracity of what they have been telling her all along.

As described by participants, competitive aspects of these academic cultures are also reinforced and propagated by the sometimes subtle but oftentimes more overt departmental practices engaged in by senior faculty and administrators. Departments are described by participants as fostering status and prestige differentials through such practices as the way office space is allocated, the way merit raises are distributed, how graduate student advising is monitored, and public pronouncements during faculty meetings comtrasting the research output levels of departmental members. More subtle interactions with colleagues, however, leave lasting imprints, particularly statements made by senior faculty that are perceived as threatening. Consider Bob's reaction to what he perceives to be a senior colleague's devaluing of Bob's specialty within the discipline:

> I have occasionally been stunned at the perception of some of the older faculty. I have been told that what I do isn't, in their opinion, [part of the discipline] and why am I here (in the department) -- "Shouldn't you be across the street at [a related department]?" And I view those kinds of perceptions as dangerous to me, dangerous to my well-being, because if they don't think what I do is [part of the discipline], then they don't think it's very important to the mission of this department. And they don't lose any sleep if I disappear. (Bob)

Sometimes the attitudes that influence perceptions and actions appear more covert. For Mary, junior-senior faculty dynamics are complicated by a perceived reluctance on the part of senior faculty to get "too close" to junior faculty.

This is illustrated by her perceptions of a luncheon she attended with newly tenured associate professors:

> ... after we had that luncheon with the associate professors -- the brand-new associate professors talking about the tenure process -- when we came back over here, I ran into one of them and I thanked her for doing that, that it was a helpful process, although, it made me very anxious. She sort of patted me on the shoulder and said, "From what I see, you have nothing to worry about." But I also feel, not only from her but from some of the senior professors, this tension, like they like me and they would like to get to know me, but they're afraid to do that because they don't want to mislead me in any way or they don't want to like me too much and then in two years find I'm not here anymore. It must be a hard thing for them, too, to generate friendships and then have these people just whisked away. And sometimes whisked away within a heartbeat. So I do feel there's always this ambivalence, like "We'd like to have you, but we're not sure we're going to get to keep you." So I get paranoid and I get nervous, and I feel like I belong but I don't really belong, and it's a limbo that I feel like I'm living in. (Mary)

Mary admits to feelings of ambivalence, anxiety, and vulnerability. The mixed messages from senior faculty garner suspicion, distrust, and in this case, the sense of living in "a limbo."

Performance Appraisal Pressures

Across faculty participants, performance appraisal pressures in academic departments are complicated by, among other things, complex interpersonal dynamics among colleagues. Although many described personal reactions to these dynamics, they more often described defensive reactions of colleagues. I came to recognize the degree to which participants believe that <u>they</u> must assume a defensive stance and was struck by their varied reactions.

<u>"Pinning Down" Tenure Criteria</u>

Perhaps the most commonly mentioned behavior in response to performance appraisal pressures is a preoccupation with "knowing" and -- what one participant in this study referred to as -- "pinning down" from authorities both what is

expected and what will hold weight in tenure proceedings. Their preoccupation with "knowing" mostly centers around narrowing down a numeric range of refereed publications expected for tenure or trying to interpret the meaning of language used in reference to publishing and fund-raising in university and departmental documents. Bob reveals his concern for getting what he terms a "straight, clear answer as to what's expected":

> ... the biggest concern I have about it is that you can't get a straight, clear answer as to what's expected of you. In other words, nobody will say six papers is enough or eight papers, or five papers and $300,000 or seven papers and $200,000 or ... (Bob)

Knowing that "everything that really counts is money and papers," he seeks out some sign of what combination of grant money and articles are required. His focus necessarily becomes narrowed as, "let's face it, service and teaching and everything else, that just has to meet some minimal adequate level." In spite of his knowing what "really counts," he perceives the criteria for promotion and tenure as evasive. He recognizes that paper output may not be enough:

> One of the things that you'll hear from senior faculty is that what they really want to see is continuity in paper output. It's not even just the raw number of papers, but are they coming out at regular intervals. In other words, are you working steadily. So apparently all curriculum vitae with ten publications are not created equal. If you get a flurry of eight publications in one little narrow slice of time because you happen to be particularly productive and then there's a large gap of time with basically nothing going on, that's not as good as ten papers sort of evenly spaced over a period of time -- or even 7 papers, but evenly spaced. So there are all these variables, and you don't know how to play one off against the other. (Bob)

Bob finds himself preoccupied with the language bantered about by colleagues in reference to publishing and fund raising, such as "continuity in paper output" and "working steadily." For Bob, "pinning down" tenure criteria necessitates that he believe and trust that the meaning he ascribes to evaluatory language is shared by senior faculty evaluators.

Karen's preoccupation with identifying what she terms the "magic number" of required journal articles spans conversations with the director of the doctoral program, the dean, female faculty "caucusing" in her department, and colleagues from other disciplines. "Sometimes," Karen says, "people say the number." She adds,

> The director of the doctoral program the other day said seven or eight. [DV: In what form?] Articles.... I didn't go in to talk about tenure, so somehow we wandered onto that topic. The women faculty were caucusing, trying to decide who was going to be on the P & T Committee next year, so we were talking about the P & T Committee. So, that's what came out was the number of articles. Then other people have said, well, see what the last person who got tenure, see how many they had.... I got a letter from the dean saying, "This memo is to inform you that you are up next year for the required fourth-year review. Please familiarize yourself with the (requirements)..." I've got the college handbook here open to the P & T section because I'm trying to (familiarize myself) -- but, you know, nothing's in there, in terms of the magic number. Then I said to [a colleague in another department] that I've been told seven or eight and she said, "Oh, my God, that's an awful lot." Because in [her colleague's field] two would be a lot, or three, because each article is like a 100-page dissertation, so it's very confusing. (Karen)

Finding herself comparing contradictory reports from different sources, she is left confused and bewildered. Her frustration is carried into meetings with the Dean:

> ... So then I asked him about the tenure thing -- is it six to seven, seven to eight? And he said, "Well, I don't know where you heard seven to eight." And then I felt, "Well, you haven't told me everything, so don't be surprised I'm asking other people." It's six to seven, and he says "It's not just publications ... You know, we want to see good teaching and good service."... I'm really concerned because I talked to Katie (a tenure-track colleague) and I felt like, vis-a-vis her, I was in pretty good shape. Only now she says she's going to have 14 publications and I'm wondering does that drag up the norm? And he said, "You mean, is she a rate-buster?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, no, I don't see why that should change the norm," with again that kind of uncertainty in his voice. And he said, "It's not just the number of publications. It's where." He said, "For example, publishing in [a field journal in their discipline] wouldn't be the best thing." And I felt that was a really slam on Katie, because she's a [specialist in that field]. Why would he pick that one journal to make note of? He's

> such a motherfucker, he's such a snake in the grass. So I realized what he was doing -- trashing Katie without trashing Katie ... (Karen)

"Publish, Publish, Publish"

Performance appraisal pressures are perceived to directly and visibly influence participants' work lives and priorities. Across all eighteen participants in this study, the quality of one's teaching was perceived to hold little or no weight in the academic reward system at a research university. As a group representing a diversity of departments and disciplines, participants in this study display an unequivocal sense of what is valued and what ultimately will be rewarded in promotion and tenure proceedings. Consider the claims of Mary, Bob, and Karen:

> They do -- and they told us this -- they do value research above everything else. If you're a really bad teacher, they will worry about that; but if you've published a wonderful book with Cambridge or Harvard or Oxford -- from what I hear -- that teaching won't prevent you from getting tenure. But the other way around doesn't work. If you're a wonderful teacher but haven't published a book, you don't get tenure. So it's the research that's first. (Mary)

> I've never heard of anybody being denied tenure because their service record wasn't good enough. Not even because their teaching record wasn't good enough. It always comes down to research. Everything else has to meet some minimum. (Bob)

> [DV: Is the pressure you feel self-imposed or does in come from without?] All of the above, because I feel if it's internal pressure, it's only coming from my reading the handwriting on the wall -- publish, publish, publish. (Karen)

With the exception of three of the eighteen sampled, participants admitted that the direction of their research, choice of publishing outlets, and/or the allocation of their work time is influenced by tenure pressures. For instance, participants admitted to having to stay "focused and very conservative" in their research program, to "not branch out and try new things that might be exiting," or not allow their work to come to its "natural fruition."

This knowledge leads most participants to approach their work strategically. Oftentimes, the strategies are a response to examples set or advice provided by mentors during graduate studies. Regarding the development of a research program, this is clearly the case with Paul:

> ... there was one professor at [his Ph.D. institution] who was an assistant professor then. He gave me some advice that I've taken myself ... and that is when you set up your lab you have two projects. You have one that will get you tenure and one that probably won't pay off for five years. And that's what I'm doing -- I've got one that will get me tenure. All the parts are there and we're moving forward with it whether it's interesting or not. And then the other one is potentially much more important, but may not generate anything publishable for a couple of years. And so the first grant went for the project that I knew would get me tenure -- the first graduate students and technicians would go on that project. (Paul)

Considering this strategy, Paul is prepared to move forward on the short-term research project regardless of "whether it's interesting or not." He makes clear his pragmatic motives and the adjustments he is willing to make in his overall research program. For his forementioned colleague, it means generating a specified number of what he terms "least publishable units."

For both Mary and Karen, however, there appears a reluctance to adjust research priorities and interests to meet perceived requirements for tenure. Karen feels the "dilemma" of whether to follow her preference of publishing in a women's journal in her field or to "compromise" and "pay (her) dues" by submitting the manuscript to a mainstream journal, "the Dean's favorite":

> I think "compromise" is too gentle a word. For example, there's this journal called Perspectives [pseudonym], the journal of women in [her field], which I just had a second article accepted -- so this will be my second one now. And Sandy [her colleague] and I are working on an article on feminist theory in [her field], two things that have not been tied together yet in the literature, so it's going to be an important piece. I would prefer to submit it to Perspectives. The people who read Perspectives are the people we want to talk to, and I want Perspectives to be able to have the status of leading the professional literature in this topic. Sandy suggested -- and Sandy is a prolific publisher, very prolific writer

> -- (that) maybe we ought to submit it to [a mainstream journal in her field], the dean's favorite journal. It's the professional journal of the national association, that it would be good in terms of prestige and status, and maybe it would be good if the people who read [the mainstream journal] knew about this stuff. So I feel this question really represents this dilemma -- do I do it because this would be one of the first, so-called, first-tier journals, would I be paying my dues that way, and write it in such a way that it would be palatable to [the mainstream journal]?' Or do I submit it to Perspectives the first time around, [knowing that] they'd snap it up? (Karen)

Following up on her comment that "compromise" may be "too gentle a word" in this case, I asked her to clarify her sentiment:

> [It is] somehow selling out part of your soul -- I'm thinking of Dorian Gray. At the end of Dorian Gray, like all his faces, the sins that he'd done appeared on his face and it was all kind of ugly and melted. Somehow you're not just making a compromise. It's not just that you want to have roast beef and your wife wants turkey, so you decide to have turkey this week and next week you make a roast beef -- it's not that kind of a compromise. It's much more basic to your makeup. Being a feminist isn't just how I make a living; it's who I am. And that's why I feel like my commitment to my feminism and serving women and having women as the focus would be compromised. (Karen)

Analogously, Mary describes her dilemma, convinced that she needs to have a book published out of her dissertation in order to get tenure. She recalls with a sense of excitement an experience she had where an idea for a paper was generated out of a classroom teaching experience:

> So I wrote this article out of that class and it was immediately accepted, which was lucky. Because if it hadn't been, I don t know if I could have gone back to it. I wouldn't have had the time. But that's the only time that I have said, "No, I'm not going to work on my book." The same sort of thing happened to me in my last graduate seminar that I taught. I came up with this idea about [topic from her field] and I sat down one night and wrote out some ideas on it. And then a friend of mine said, "You can't work on this. You just can't do it. You have got to get back to this book." And I realized that she was right. It would've taken me a good month to come up with the research and stuff, and I couldn't afford that time away from the book. I did it the first time because I was just tired of the dissertation and I couldn't look at it one more time to make it work as a book. And then after I got the [article out of her class] thing out of my system, I was ready to go back and do the book again. Everything has been geared towards that... (Mary)

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Laden with the pressure of turning her dissertation into a book, Mary's creative energies must be steered away from emerging scholarly interests to the lingering dissertation.

"It's Almost Like Praise But No Praise"

For those who are on the receiving end of more definitive forms of feedback, feeling forced to "read into" what is not being said or having to deal with contradictory messages can become both a frustration and a preoccupation. Hearing that he needs to improve his service record sparks reactions of frustration and resentment in Bob:

> I'm always looking for what do I need to do now? ... My last letter [from an annual review] that came back said, "Well, you submitted papers -- that's good. You had a couple of papers accepted -- that's good. Your teaching reviews have generally been good -- that's nice. In the area of service, perhaps you should organize a session at a national or international conference." Now, there's something fundamentally wrong there. Assistant professors should not be organizing sessions at major national or international conferences. (Bob)

Mary, on the other hand, has a contrasting reaction as she is once again reminded of the lingering pressure of having to transform her dissertation into a book:

> All of my evaluations have been very positive. They have praised me for both my teaching and also my service, and they've written follow-up letters that say the same thing. And they have liked the other things that I've been publishing -- the articles -- but they have always ended with "Get back to that manuscript -- get the book done." So it's almost like praise but no praise. Or they take away the praise that they've given ... (Mary)

Recognizing the conditional nature of any positive feedback she receives, she accepts the feedback and moves ahead. For both Mary and Bob, the formal feedback they receive admittedly has an influence on their lives:

> Everybody always gets a letter that points to something, so this is what they picked in my particular case. But you feel like you're on this hot plate. They're always going to find something. You pick this end up, something's going to slide over here. Finishing them up, pushing them out ... (Bob)

> That's coming up for me in the spring [the fourth-year review], and I'm anxious about it, obviously, because it's an evaluative process, and to a certain extent I take that personally -- somebody saying to me, "Your teaching is not up to snuff," or "your publishing isn't up to par," "your service isn't up to par" ... I try to do my best in all of those areas, and when I get criticized in them, I take it personally. (Mary)

"Doing The Right Thing"

Social expectations is another area where participants spoke candidly about their feelings. I asked Mary to tell me more about what she termed the "social side of being known and accepted":

> I think it has an unconscious psychological effect on people. You're visible, and so when your name comes up before them for tenure they remember you, they know who you are. If they like you, they may be more inclined, if it's a borderline case, to vote in your favor. But I also like a lot of people in this department, so I don't go to the parties -- in fact, this is probably a fault of mine, or not necessarily a fault, but a poor decision of mine is I don't go to the parties simply because I want to do what's politically correct. I go to them because I think I'll have a good time. And I've skipped a lot of parties that I just knew I wasn't going to have fun at. [DV: Do you sense people do go to parties because it's politically correct?] Yes, and they do a lot of things because it's politically correct, have lunch with somebody different every day -- I don't see where they find the time for that. But I don't want to suck up to people that I don't like, and if that's what I have to do to get tenure, then forget it. I'm not going to do it. I'd want to get along with them, but I'm not going to do things that would seem to me dishonest or out of character for me. (Mary)

Giving in to "politically correct" social expectations represents for Mary an unforgivable compromise, while rebelling against these same expectations symbolizes for her a strength of character.

Karen, on the other hand, is faced with the dilemma of whether to sing in a choir concert at her church or attend an important gathering of the women's caucus in her department:

> Well, unfortunately, the night of that meeting I was performing in a choir concert at the Women's Center. And here's, again, this conflict. I thought, "God, they're going to be talking about something that's going to affect my career. I should go to that," but practically the only social thing I do on a regular basis is go

> to church and sing in choir. And I already feel guilty enough about that, now here they called a caucus meeting the same night as the choir concert. It was such a conflict for me. [DV: How were you feeling during that?] I was feeling absolutely pulled in half.... [It is] the one thing I do. [DV: Did you resent the fact that you had to make the decision?] If I resented anything, I resented that I went to the concert. I wouldn't have done it differently, but I really resented not being at the caucus -- it was a pot-luck supper. And I really wonder how it was viewed by the women there.... [DV: That you were not there?] Yeah. I know people said, "I heard you were in concert," but I wonder if they feel I just blew it off and went to this other thing. (Karen)

As applied to this study, "doing the right thing" is a phrase coined by a colleague of Paul's working at a research center with a split-appointment to an academic department, who feels there are certain things he must do to be in good standing in his "home" department. This includes not "speaking up about divisive issues" at faculty meetings, where he might be taking a "chance of ticking somebody off." In contrast, Paul has developed a reputation among his peers for being bold in these meetings:

> But you get the sense in [his home department] that the department was very taken aback by the fact that (a colleague) and I spoke out as much as we did, and really challenged it (a vote at a faculty meeting).... A lot of things I'm sure they never heard junior faculty come up with, being as bold as we were. [DV: Tell me about that.] Yeah, those come in the area of expected behavior of a junior faculty member.... An example was we were at a faculty meeting where the vote to actually offer a person a job or an interview was 14-13. To me, that doesn't say hire the guy, alright? But the chairman hired him. And the next faculty meeting, we took a vote to change the name of the department, from [name 1] to [name 2] -- something more recognizable. And the vote was 19-13 in favor of changing it, and he said, "Well, since there isn't a clear consensus, I guess we won't change the name." Well, I just let him have it. I said, "Look, when does the majority rule, and when does it not?" I said, "We might as well not do anything else until we deal with this pattern of administration and we get that squared away, because you can't decide one time that 14-13 is majority rule and the next time 19-13 isn't a consensus. We voted to change it -- that was the vote." And a lot of mouths dropped. A junior faculty member is challenging the chairman. But I don't pay any attention to those things. Title or whatever doesn't mean anything if there's not substance to the person. [DV: Did you get any reactions from your colleagues?] Some people said, "Well, I'm glad it was you saying it," or "It took a lot of balls to say that. I'm glad you said it."

> And they said, "You actually did yourself a lot of favors." [DV: Why?] Well, I was right. If I did anything wrong, I probably would have made a lot of enemies. But the fact that that was the right thing, he did back down from it.... It shouldn't have mattered whether you were a junior faculty member or not. Somebody had to call him on it, and the fact that I did it was to my benefit. Somebody stood up for what was the right thing. So those are the kinds of things that we do that a lot of the other junior faculty wouldn't do. (Paul)

Paul is well aware that his actions may be perceived as breaking the code of "expected behavior of junior faculty" and, in direct contrast to most of his colleagues, he is willing to take that risk. As it relates to a taken-for-granted code of expected behavior among tenure-track colleagues, "doing the right thing" can take on different meanings.

"It's Like a Sword Hanging Over (My) Head"

One-third of the participants -- both males and females -- revealed to me ways in which work and tenure pressures impact upon their marriage and family. Bob sees tenure as something which "dominates" his thoughts and conversations both at work and at home, describing the "big impact" tenure has had on both his and his wife's life:

> If I get it [tenure], we'll probably live in [this city] for a while. If I don't, we won't. And so it's like a sword hanging over her head, as well. So, yeah, it's affected my personal life. I hope it hasn't completely skewed my personality and my way of looking at the world, and I think I'm still capable of having fun. And I'd have to say I'm generally a happy person, actually, although there have been times since I've been here that I've been really concerned. And I eat more Tums than I used to -- I do have an ulcer, which I didn't get here but which had pretty much subsided a long time ago and has flared up since I got here. So there's no doubt that it puts stress on you. (Bob)

Karen, on the other hand, reveals to me, "I don't feel like I have a life away from work." She continues,

> I mean, in a sense I do, in the sense that I have a worship community that I'm involved in, and a choir there. But I really don't. I teach three nights a week, and if I weren't teaching those three nights I'd be writing anyway. To me, it's a big sacrifice of

> my working time just to go to the [varsity women's] basketball games. I haven't seen a movie in ... maybe six months, if then. [Her partner and she] signed up for the *Prestige Dining Club* so it would make us go out to dinner sometimes. And I said to [a colleague] one time (when) we sat down at a faculty meeting, "Chris, do you have any personal life?" And she said, "Well, I have Pat" -- her partner. I can't imagine. I feel like I've regressed already, in terms of a social life. If there's a weekend when we're going to have company over for dinner, it's a real crisis because I get so stressed out knowing that I'm going to lose that work time to prepare dinner. And that's my favorite thing, having people over for dinner, but it really causes a crisis because it adds that much more stress on that week, because I'm losing that writing time.... (Karen)

Feeling guilt about being involved in a worship community, describing recreational pursuits as a "big sacrifice," and letting entertaining others, which she admittedly enjoys, exacerbate her high stress level, Karen laments having "regressed ... in terms of a social life." Any unplanned recreation leaves her feeling like she's "losing that writing time." She later characterizes the imposed time pressures of the tenure process as leaving her feeling "like a gerbil." In spite of her aforementioned quest to prove herself, she finds solace in knowing she "wouldn't trade this ... I have the best job in the world."

Meanings Ascribed to Acquiring Academic Tenure

Over the course of our conversations, I came to understand that the relative importance of acquiring tenure for participants is intricately related to their ways of dealing with day-to-day pressures. This was the area where gender differences most vividly surfaced.

For males in the sample, specifically those associated with "hard" sciences, there appears traces of the values and norms of science echoing the "ethos of science" originally conceptualized by Merton (1938). Invariably, the Mertonian-like "imperatives" involve concentrating on task, "doing science," and

working independently. These are the values that appear intricately related to the males' philosophies of coping. Their self-discipline comes through focusing on task, securing grants and getting the papers out, and distancing themselves from departmental dynamics and politics. They possess a sense of optimism and confidence that things will fall into place and meritorious rewards will naturally follow. Consider Paul's attitudes:

> I haven't really had the same kinds of anxieties (as his peers) about "Well, I've got to get tenure, I've got to this and I've got to do that." I pretty much feel confident enough that I'll do what is required, and confident that I'll do well enough to get tenure. And the way to assure that is to concentrate on doing the science and not worrying about it. It's hard to do, but I think a lot of times that if you can get that different perspective in your mind it helps a lot. [DV: A different perspective?] The difference between worrying about it ... well, to illustrate it best, I have a technician who, from watching her work, instead of concentrating on experiments and knowing what's next to do and so forth, so that she doesn't make a mistake, she worries about making a mistake. And by worrying about making a mistake, her thoughts are on worrying and so she ends up making a mistake. So it's the same thing thinking about tenure, and what you have to do is don't worry about getting tenure. Think about the science, think about doing your job, concentrating, focusing on doing that, and basically trying not to be a worrywart. And if you can not worry about it, things will start going and working better, and it just makes it that much easier not to worry. Both of those cycles are self-perpetuating. If you start worrying, you'll get more worried. So it's important to get off on the right track.... You have to approach things and understand them as a process. (Paul)

Paul believes that if he focuses on science, concentrates, and minimizes his worrying, "things will start going and working better," fall into place, and rewards will follow. Trying not to look too far into the future, he keeps on task, focused, and above all, self-disciplined. His disciplined daily routine appears to be a by-product of his philosophy of science and his philosophy of work. He continues,

> It's like Julie, my wife, when she's working, she says, "Oh, I lost a day." You didn't lose a day. You can't lose a day -- it didn't go anywhere. You can't fall behind in doing science, doing a research project, because that's what you do the next day. It's a

> definite difference, and in some ways subtle, but it can make a big difference in how effective you are because of the way in which you can focus your energies ... getting a grant, getting publications, doing research. Well, to do each of those little things means coming back in at night or working on weekends, and I do all of those things. But in my mind I'm not thinking "I got to do this to get tenure." I'm thinking, "I have to write this to get the paper out, or I'm writing the paper, writing the grant." And that's important when you're doing it -- to focus more on the immediate than the long-term, because you'll make too many mistakes and not see things you wanted to see. You have to look at things from a broader picture and decide what it is you should be doing, and when you're doing it you don't sit in front of the computer and say, "Oh, God, I have to do this to get tenure." You won't get anywhere. (Paul)

The strength of his optimism is reflected in his lack of worry about possibly being denied tenure. Like many of the other males, he ultimately believes that fairness and justice will prevail.

The attitudes of these male faculty toward their jobs extend to the relative meaning they ascribe to acquiring academic tenure. Both Paul and Bob discuss what acquiring tenure has come to mean for them:

> A couple of things. One is you've proven yourself by getting tenure. I guess it goes back to the idea that you can't really bitch about something unless you can master it.... That's sort of what I looked at tenure as, as a step or a designation of accomplishment that gives you a certain status or right. Just becoming tenured is sort of saying you have that stamp of approval -- Grade A, USDA Choice, or whatever.... If I was tenured here, that would mean that I could move to somewhere else with tenure. So that's why it's important. It gives you that stamp of approval -- well, he got tenure there, he can come in here. (Paul)

> You asked me about, at our first meeting, the motivation to go back to get a Ph.D. and I said, well, it sort of represented the epitome of the profession to me, and then I said being a college professor is, in some sense, the epitome of the profession because they are the movers and the shakers that direct where the science goes ... if I'm going to bother to do this, I want to be good at it, I want to do it right. Well, achieving tenure is sort of another stamp along the way.... I'm just sappy enough to believe it (that) this represents sort of another stamp of achievement, that it's a neat thing to be (tenured). (Bob)

Paul draws the analogy between acquiring tenure and "training to run a marathon":

> It's not any different, in many aspects, from training to run a marathon, and you can go twenty miles in training sessions and then you don't know that you can go the 26 until you do it. And you don't have to prove it to anybody else. It's really a question of self, and that's an awful lot of it. It's in the mind -- can you do it? You have to get the confidence that you can do it. [DV: So how important is it to you to acquire tenure?] Very important. It's very important. The importance of it may not have been fairly communicated by my talking about the process. The end is important. I'd say that graduating from high school, I never thought about it. It was never important -- I was going to do it. It was never even a question. Graduating from college I never really questioned, either. It was expected ... the end points are visible (and) have a label with them ... it (acquiring tenure) is very much the same thing. And I'd say this is probably the most goal-conscious I've been about something, other than getting a job. Post-doc was get a job. Assistant professor -- get tenure. (Paul)

As females responded to my questions about what it means to them to acquire academic tenure, they, like the males, refer to such notions as job stability and security, increased mobility, and evidence of having proven themselves among peers. The subtle differences between male and female responses, however, are reflected in the insights of both Karen and Mary. They respond to my question "What does acquiring tenure mean to you?":

> I guess tenure is, in some ways, a test of whether or not you are considered indispensable or essential, as well as qualified.... To me, it reserves -- like reserving a table in a restaurant -- it reserves a space in which I can do my work, and I mean work broadly in terms of research, writing, community activism, advocacy, my whole project that's me. [DV: And how does tenure reserve that?] Because it guarantees me a paycheck. Now, let's say I got tenure and I then decided to really branch off and do a lot of qualitative research about communes, or something that people aren't interested in or interested in publishing. It might mean I might not be promoted, but I wouldn't lose my job. So it gives me space in which I can be myself. (Karen)

> It [acquiring tenure] means a great deal to me, because I put a lot of stock in simply the respect that seems to come along with it. It's not so much that I can stay here forever now if I want -- that doesn't mean that much to me. But it's the indication from my colleagues that I am important, and that I am doing a good job, and that they want me to hang around. So it's not so much a practical thing as it is maybe a ethical thing, or a personal thing. (Mary)

The meaning of acquiring tenure is more personalized. While for most males the recognition of being granted tenure is viewed as a symbol of reward, for females the recognition of being granted tenure is viewed as a validation of their worth and legitimacy as an academic.

The Enduring Trial

For many of the women I interviewed, the quest for approval from others during the tenure process is linked to and reminiscent of struggles for approval during childhood and adolescence. There appears to be a intricate connection between female's experience of prior evaluatory judgments, current dealings with the tenure process, and the meaning they assign to acquiring tenure. Overwhelmingly, a fear of failure pervades many of their tales.

As a case in point, I will reconstruct the words of Mary, who consciously works through scenarios in her mind of how she might deal with a possible tenure denial. She leads into this by telling me of the emotions she experienced upon simultaneously receiving good and bad news a few days earlier:

> It's really funny -- the other day I came to my mailbox and I got two rejections from publishers, and I got one letter from a group who is choosing the best teacher in arts and humanities telling me that I was one of the ten finalists and they wanted me to come to this interview on next Tuesday night. And so it was one second my heart fell to the ground and then it came back up, so it was really an odd experience to have. I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be depressed or to be really happy. And it works like that almost every day. You just have to try to concentrate on the positive rather than the negative.... I've learned that rejection is a part of this field. And if you can't develop a pretty strong hide that repels any sort of feelings of depression, then you're not going to last very long. And I've also learned that rejection isn't necessarily a personal thing. Sometimes your article can be rejected for no other reason that the editor didn't like your last name ... So I know that it's not necessarily a rejection of my work, or even of my ideas. (Mary)

Forced to deal with two seemingly contradictory feelings, she focuses on the positive and tries not to personalize the rejections that inevitably come her way. This philosophy of coping is something she attempts to project into how she might deal with a possible tenure denial:

> I'm afraid if I don't get tenure I can't stay in this field.... [And] it just scares me that I might be thrust out of this field for really no fault of my own. That depresses me.... I don't think if I don't stay in this field I'm going to be ruined, however. My life is not going to end -- I have a lot of interests in my life and a lot of things that I would like to do.... So it could be that this whole tenure process, if it goes the wrong way, could just sour me on the profession completely. It might be the best thing to happen to me, just to get me out of here. I mean, it's a hard job. It really is.... I'm sure that there are things out there that are a lot easier, that I could go home in the evening and watch TV, or read a book I want to read and relax. And maybe sleep eight hours a night. So I could probably talk myself into liking being out of the profession, but I would miss it, too. But my life won't be ruined. (Mary)

Although she rationally knows that if she doesn't get tenure she could go somewhere else, "maybe a small liberal arts school," emotionally she feels she would have failed and the pain of being denied tenure would force her out of the field. Coming to terms with what would be an ultimate rejection, she intermixes two strategies: projecting blame on the organization/system and assuming responsibility herself. But in her mind, the latter wins out:

> I think what will hit me the hardest if I don't stay in this profession is I will feel like I have let myself down. I would feel responsible even if these things that we're talking about [the intangibles] didn't influence the final decision ... I will still feel responsible for not having done it (acquired tenure). [DV: Even though they're out of your control.] Yes, I will still feel responsible. I would think there was something -- there was a party I could have gone to, there was an article that I could have written, I could have worked on that one day and I didn't, instead I played tennis. There was something I could have done that would've been the determining factor. (Mary)

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And as she contemplates what she perceives to be the expectations and requirements for tenure, the determining factor that makes or breaks an individual's candidacy in her mind is getting a book published:

> If I don't get my book published, then I will blame myself. I either wrote on the wrong subject or I didn't write a good enough book, I didn't start soon enough -- I did something wrong. But if I get my book published and then don't get tenure, I will feel a loss of respect. And that will be what hurts. It's the fact that they didn't like what I was doing, not that I didn't do what I was supposed to do. And I think there's a difference there. (Mary)

Her reasoning boxes her in a "no-win situation," leaving her no one to blame but herself, despite the fact that she earlier suggests that she "might be thrust out of this field for really no fault of my own." The ultimate tragedy for Mary would be the perception that she has done what she "was supposed to do" and yet still "they didn't like what I was doing." She readily admits her dependency upon the positive regard and feedback from her colleagues:

> I think I'm way too much dependent on feedback, and some sort of outside reward. I think I need to get much more of that from inside me, and to a certain extent I have a lot of confidence in myself, but I still need that sort of paternal reassurance, to say, "Yes, you're good," and "Yes, we like what you're doing," and "Here's a lollipop to show you that we like what you're doing." I think I could work on that and grow up a little more in that respect, but I still do need some of the outside recognition. And to me that's partly what tenure is. (Mary)

Mary apparently draws a connection in her mind between emotions with which she currently struggles and her prior experiences, both her schooling and her relationship with her parents. This need for "some sort of outside reward" carries through to the present as she says, "that's partly what tenure is." The importance of acquiring tenure, however, is inflated:

> I think, to a certain extent, I set it [tenure] up as some sort of nirvana. This is what I'm going for, and if I don't get it, it means I've failed. And maybe what I need to do now in the next six months is to try to work out of that feeling. And I think I'm partly doing that. I can feel myself being a little bit defensive, and saying "Hey, this doesn't mean everything. You have many other

> talents that you can do, and many other things you could do with your life," and so I think I'm already setting up the barriers that would protect me from total devastation.... We live in such a success-oriented culture, and failures are frowned upon both in sports and in business, and I know in my own family, in particular, it's always been "You can do what you want to do, but you better do it well." So my parents really don't understand, either, which is hard. Because I tell them this is a hard thing to get, and they say, "Oh, you're wonderful. They'll give you tenure." And you try to explain it to them, and then you realize they're just not going to understand. But that kind of puts pressure on you, because you think, "Well, they expect me to do that, so how am I going to explain to them if I don't? Are they going to think I'm less wonderful?" They won't do that, but I'm sure they'll be perplexed if I don't (get tenured). They'll wonder what's wrong with the university system that they don't give someone like me tenure.... So maybe I'm preparing them for the possibility of failing. (Mary)

Reflecting on her past, Mary recognizes that she is still dealing with issues surrounding pleasing her parents and their unspoken expectations. The importance of the goal she has set for herself becomes inflated, particularly as she envisions it as viewed through the eyes of her parents. As she describes the importance of acquiring academic tenure, it becomes one in a legacy of "all-or-nothing situations," and the fear of failure becomes a consuming preoccupation.

Summary and Observations

The four individuals whose narratives I have reconstructed and contrasted in this paper represent unique perceptions of and experiences with the academic tenuring system. As noted earlier, however, they in no way purport to represent the lives of all junior faculty at major research universities. Yet, they were selected intentionally to portray the essence of insights shared by the other 14 participants in this research. In a spirit of this interview methodology and in an attempt to draw some summary observations about the nine female and nine male faculty participants, I offer an analysis of the commonalities and differences in their perceptions and experiences with the academic tenuring system.

Although both genders appear influenced by familial values, female participants more often than males speak of the influence of parental expectations on their emerging career interests and appraisal of their potential, and admit to carrying the weight of parental expectations. Particularly for the females, judgments made by others about their potential became a force in their lives in ways different than men and how they deal with these judgments foreshadow later ways they cope with the pressures of acquiring tenure.

A striking aspect of participants' insights into the interpersonal dynamics among faculty in their departments involves a preoccupation with knowing where they stand in the tenure process and the craving of specific indices in this pursuit. Their stories reveal a variety of comparative and competitive practices, often oriented around the composition of cohorts, the demography of the department, and the experience of forerunners in the process. These comparative and competitive practices appear to influence how these faculty think about their own chances for success. As revealed in the perceptions of many females, a preoccupation with the experience of forerunners can become a source of apprehension, anxiety, and sometimes fear. The quest to "pin down tenure criteria" and "do the right thing" becomes a complex game played among tenure-track and senior faculty colleagues. Caught within a process that at times appears both subjective and idiosyncratic, participants find themselves having to make sense of oftentimes conflicting indices and reports.

Participants' narratives reveal aspects of a culture of competition, where status and prestige differentials are reinforced and propagated through departmental practices and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Being made to feel like you "belong but really don't belong" or being treated in a less-than-respectful manner in social situations can send subtle but strong

messages to the receiver. The more overt actions of departments -- such as public statements at faculty meetings or the way office space is allocated -- make a distinct statement to junior faculty about who is and who is not valued. In the meantime, values are shaped, status differentials are reinforced, and certain individuals are placed in positions of advantage over others.

There appears to be an intricate relationship between how participants classify colleagues in their work unit and how they think about who are and are not their "peers." This is particularly true as it relates to how they are being evaluated in tenure and promotion decisions. Colleagues within a work unit are often viewed as having formal and/or split allegiances, leading to perceptions of "in-groups" having positions of unfair advantage over "out-groups." Other participants speak more ambiguously of "in-groups" and "out-groups," suggesting much more fluctuating boundaries. Depending upon where one locates oneself, feelings of either connectiveness or isolation result as well as feelings of defensiveness. For those who perceive themselves on the margins, the differential advantages of colleagues appear to be accentuated. As exhibited in the narratives selected, participants can be left feeling confused and, as is the case with most females in the sample, feeling isolated. Underlying a number of women's tales is a sense of suspicion and distrust -- at having listened to collegial-type rhetoric in one arena, and witnessing evidence to the contrary in another.

Although both males and females in this study struggle with the issue of social expectations, males appeared more likely to arrive at a decisive stand and point of resolution while females continually feel ambivalent. Social engagements are but one of a number of departmental programs over which participants ponder whether their presence or absence will be noticed. They

reveal the unspoken code of -- what one participant termed -- an "expected behavior of junior faculty" that influences not only their behavior but how they perceive senior faculty might react to that behavior. As exhibited by a number of males who describe conforming to the defensive behaviors of colleagues and recognizing the importance of being seen "doing the right thing," both sexes admit to engaging in such behaviors. For some participants, however, most noticeably females, "doing the right thing" can lead to compromising one's values and/or violating closely-held principles. Although both sexes admit to occasionally "playing the game," females much more than males reveal engaging in defensive-oriented behaviors and label them as such.

Particularly in "hard-pure" and "hard-applied" science disciplines, participants perceive there to be considerable pressure to produce large quantities of research articles and publish them in a narrow range of publishing outlets. For some, the task of maximizing publishing output implies figuring out a strategy whereby numerous papers can be published from a single research project and/or within the constraints of an existing research program. Teaching, service, and undergraduate education are necessarily considered less important that research and publishing. In the perception of most participants, these priorities are all viewed low within in the academic reward system.

Male participants associate acquiring tenure with job stability and security, increased mobility, as well as status and power within their work unit and beyond. They also view it as a symbol of having proven themselves among peers. To varying degrees, the prospect of acquiring tenure appears a stroke to the ego. And thus having proven one's abilities and achieved such status and accomplishment, rights and privileges are expected to be forthcoming.

Although both sexes appear to go through similar steps and face similar obstacles in the tenure process in their respective disciplines, female participants confront the tenure system as one of a legacy of ongoing "tests" by which they are placed in the position of having to prove something to others and themselves. Clark and Corcoran's (1986) conclusion that women academics face "accumulative disadvantage" from the time they choose graduate school through career entry and beyond rings true to the experiences women describe in this study. In their study, Clark and Corcoran note that during the training and entry phases of their careers, women often had "particularistic experiences with advisors and others who doubted the women students' potentials for, or likelihood of, having an academic career that would include research productivity" (p. 39). In my research, accumulative doubt, even more so than perceived barriers, result in the women compensating in some form or another. Some compensate with what might be considered "defense mechanisms" while others simply take steps to make them feel more "in control." Uneasy with what appears an uncertain, volatile, and oftentimes oppressive world around them, the women take charge by controlling those spheres of their lives in which they perceive themselves having some degree of choice.

The female junior faculty in this study speak in a narrative voice fundamentally different than men. Rather than speaking in a depersonalized, third-person voice characteristic of many males -- with abstract references to the "the process" and to the experiences of <u>others</u> -- many of the females in this sample speak in a personalized, emotive, first-person voice, and refer to concrete episodes in their recent and more distant past. As evidenced in the tales of Mary and Karen suggesting how their prior experiences inform their present ways of dealing with and understanding tenure pressures, females are not

only more conversant with their pasts, but they often make sense of present uncertainties and conflicts by recalling how they have dealt with situations in the past. It may well be that females in this study are simply more comfortable in the role of research participant than the males, and consequently, are more willing to "open up." Regardless, the women's narrative voice and way of knowing and understanding their experiences appear different than the men's.

The "different voice" of women in this study echoes those of women in Gilligan's (1982) work, who suggests that women resolve moral dilemmas in fundamentally different ways than men do, and the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), who suggest that women acquire and apply knowledge in fundamentally different ways than men do. In this study, much of the women's sense of "knowing," making sense, and coping with pressures in their lives originates from their own experience and intuition, as they rely upon and listen to their "inner voice." The appear to rely upon what Belenky and her colleagues (1986) refer to as "subjective" knowing in making sense of their work situation and personal lives. In particular, the women who rehearse scenarios of being denied tenure appear to be experiencing aspects of "the instability and flux that subjectivist women experience when they contemplate their future" (p. 81). The women in this study also rely upon and benefit from listening to others. In dealing with inherent uncertainties in their situation, many of these women seek out trusted colleagues to share insecurities and/or seek support. As women in this study become increasingly uncomfortable with their perceived lack of control over external contingencies in their personal and professional lives, some set up self-protective barriers to deal with these feelings while others become particularly practical and/or pragmatic about their activities.

As was the case with women in Belenky and her colleagues' sample, the ability of women in this study to identify and confront their feelings appears to illuminate and advance their thinking and understandings of their situations. The results of this study support the claim of other studies of academic women (e.g., Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bernard, 1974; Keller, 1978, 1985; Simeone, 1987) -- that in the academic profession there is such a thing as "women's experience" (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988).

Implications: Sensitivity and Awareness

As researcher, the implications of this study appear self-evident, particularly as they inform our understanding of the academic career, patterns of work and life in academic departments, and how experiences of life in academe are shaped by individual's perceptions. However, I most strongly believe that the narratives shared have the potential to raise the sensitivity and awareness of senior faculty and academic administrators to the ways various departmental practices communicate mixed messages and the complex ways junior faculty experience the dynamics of academic tenure review.

I believe social science researchers express aspects of their own personal experience and ideology in their choice of problem and methodology. In important ways, this study represented and emerged into a means of better understanding my personal struggles in dealing with evaluatory experiences in my own life. As I navigated through the uncertain and oftentimes perplexing waters of doctoral studies, I was fortunate to have been able to garner the support necessary to conduct a research project utilizing a qualitative interview methodology.

Going into my doctoral defense, the question of who would be the representative assigned by the Graduate School to join my hand selected committee

was a source of anxiety and apprehension. Two days prior to my defense I was disappointed to learn that the Chairman of a "Pure Social Science" department, known for its strong quantitative research base, would serve as my "wild card." This man was described to me as "a strong statistician" and someone who had very high expectations of his junior faculty. This knowledge made me even more acutely aware of his presence than I may have been otherwise. During the two-hour defense he remained reserved, even speechless, at times leaning back in his chair, appearing to ponder and quietly mull over the discussion shared among my committee members. Craving for some definitive feedback, I was perplexed yet relieved as he publicly acknowledged his approval at the end of the defense and signed the paperwork. Congratulating me upon leaving, he shared with me that reading my dissertation had prompted him to set up a meeting with the women faculty in his department. He realized that he needed to actively listen to their perceptions and experiences.

There could be no greater compliment to this study than to use its messages to sensitize and remind the academic community of the pressures and influences inherent in seeking promotion and tenure in higher education.

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